A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF DOMESTIC BELL-HANGING.*

In the old baronial halls not a vestige of bell-hanging has been discovered. The horn was hung outside the gate to be used as a signal for entry:

> "And loudly blew the horn that hangs
> Before Sir Hornbook's gate."

In houses of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, I believe, no trace of domestic bell-hanging has been found, but the horn continued to be used for the purpose above stated. In the reign of Queen Anne domestic bell-hanging was not introduced. Neither at Blenheim nor at Marlborough-house did I find any provision made for bell-hanging; nor at Warwick-house, Claremont, or at Hagley-hall, the seat of Lord Lyttleton. At the Earl of Brownlow's patrimonial estate, Belton-hall, near Grantham, Lincolnshire, his lordship, about forty years ago, went over the hall with me, and pointed out two large bells: one was fixed over the landing of the stairs at the north end of the hall, and at the south end, and his lordship stated "that these two bells were the only means his predecessors had of commanding the services of the servants." He said, "As it was getting into fashion to have bells from all the rooms, he must have them."

This was an early essay upon a large scale of secret bell-hanging, which had then begun to receive some attention by the sanction partially given to the plan by the principal architects in succession from that period. But the bell-hangers had to contend with many obstacles in establishing it. Orders for bell-hanging were often not given until the works had proceeded so far, that, to do secret-work, skirting-boards, &c. had to be removed, and plastering cut away, to fix tubes for secreting the wires, and I had frequent occasion to appeal to the architect. Nevertheless, the system gradually superseded the old plan; yet many mansions continued to have the bells pulled with ropes or ribbands; but the mechanical contrivances for bell-hanging were greatly improved: as the cranks were exposed in the principal rooms where ropes were used, they introduced the internal and external mortise crank, the reverse purchase, pillar, and leader crank, and cranks were made to screw up instead of being driven into the walls. The bell carriage, pendulums, and label plates were now being introduced. About this period Mr. Angel, an ingenious mechanic, obtained his patent for the wheel and chain, which for some years was in use; but if more than six or seven pulleys and chains were required, the unpleasant grating caused by the friction of the multiplicity of chains, and the little purchase to be obtained, made the pulling of the bells hard, and although they had a neat appearance, their use was gradually dispensed with. For confined space, the wheel-and-chain is indispensable, moving as it does parallel to its axis; also for working around curved and oblique places, and for such purposes, no mechanical contrivance is better suited. I believe that domestic bell-hanging was not in use more than from seventy to eighty years, and what may have been done at that period must have been done with a pulley and line, and the bell rung a short distance from the room. Iron wire, with a bar-crank, not thicker than pasteboard, succeeded the line and pulley. Copper wire within my recollection was considered too expensive, and for many years was only used in the first mansions.

Although the secret system is now fully established, even so as to be introduced into the smallest villa or cottage, yet in some noble mansions I have found very culpable neglect in the bell-hanger not having provided means to get at the work, which, like all other mechanical movements, must necessarily require to be oiled, &c.

It has often been done carelessly, and this has produced objectors. At Lord Willoughby de Eresby's, several of the bell-pulls were put out of use through this neglect.

Only brass or galvanised iron tubing should be allowed to be used in family mansions and other substantial buildings. Zinc tubing is not to be depended on: in some places it will moulder away and stop the movement of the wires: in other cases it opens, if not soldered, with heat under the flooring, and thereby causes the wires to work into the joinings of the tube and stop the movement of the wires. The proper time to commence is when the lathing is to be done, or when the roughcast plastering has commenced it should no longer be delayed: the bell-hanger will then have an opportunity of seeing his way much better, and prevent much cutting away of plastering, &c.; and it is highly necessary he should receive proper orders as to the number of pulls required, from whence, and where they are to ring, as, should any extra bell be required afterwards, it produces a difficulty.

T. B. W. D.

* The following is written by a practical bell-hanger.

THE EDINBURGH LATH-SPLITTERS.*

Lath-splitting cannot boast of great antiquity in its history. It was only introduced here about the year 1790 by a London plasterer. Previous to that period the laths of a house were as regularly and systematically sawn as the joisting or the flooring, or as tile lath is still cut at the present day. But the method of splitting the laths was soon found to be possessed of great advantages. It accordingly superseded the old method in a very short time. St. Andrew's Church was the first public building in Edinburgh where split lath was adopted. The wages of the workmen at the time of its introduction to Edinburgh were as high as 25s. and 30s. per week.

At the beginning of the present century it became separated from the plasterers, and resolved itself into two distinct branches, viz. splitting and driving. The trade continued to increase under these principles until it became established in Edinburgh, when the standard of wages stood at 18s. per week. Then came its connection with the building mania. Like every other trade connected with building at the period it had its share of the spoil. The wages rose from 18s. to 24s. per week. Skilled workmen, such as bakers, or shoemakers, or even butchers—at least, many of the most dissipated of these tradesmen actually became lath-splitters in their old age. The trade then experienced its share in the disaster. Previous to the year 1825 the wages were 18s.: in 1827 they had already fallen to 12s. and 13s. per week. Previous to that year the system of piece-work and tasking was never introduced; but now it flourished with surprising vigour. One man contracted for the lathwork of seven or eight houses: he employed a number of men, without respect to character or skill; and he paid what wages he seemed to think proper and just. Before the building mania the workmen bore a good character; but now, and for many years afterwards, they became a bye-word among their brethren, and a reproach to themselves. In the years of low wages that succeeded, the trade was deserted by most of the half-bred hands it received in 1826. Its character improved accordingly; and now, upon the whole, the lath-splitters may be considered as a sober and industrious class of men.

With the exception of sawyers, there is not another trade connected with building that offers scope so favourable for the system of working by the piece as that of lathsplitters. But how stands the fact? With the exception of one shop in Edinburgh, the system is not pursued. The men work a regular day's work and are paid a regular day's wages. An intelligent master lath-splitter says, "I have tried the men on piece-work and on day-work. I prefer the last system, and for a variety of reasons. In the first place, when they did work by the piece they were irregular in their hours, uncivil in their deportment, and dissipated in their habits. With day-wages they are in every respect the reverse. I have noticed it repeatedly, that the men who are the most punctual to their hours are, generally speaking, the most sober and industrious. I never yet saw a man punctual to his hours who worked by the piece. Again, I can always command men who are ready and willing to turn out to a different job without the risk of having grumbling refusals given me, as I infallibly would if they were piece-workers; and, last of all, I run no risk of getting my materials destroyed with the careless haste of the men; and I can, moreover, depend at all times on the production of good work." The workmen themselves prefer the regular wages to the system of working by the piece, although the average rate of the one is considerably lower than that of the other.

At present there are—including apprentices, whose numbers cannot exceed a dozen—upwards of sixty lath-splitters in Edinburgh. The wages of journeymen range from 15s. to 20s. a week, and they are the same in the winter season. The term of apprenticeship is five years, and the wages begin with 3s. per week. The men are intelligent, but generally extreme in their political opinions. The trade is a healthy one, as most trades connected with timber are.

The wood employed for lath-splitting is imported from the Baltic—chiefly from Cronstadt, Riga, and Memel. The easiest worked and most profitable lath-wood is that from Cronstadt. There is some imported from America, but it is of inferior quality, and less profitable to split.

* Abridged from the *Edinburgh News*.

IRISH BUILDING AND OTHER DOINGS.

The necessary surveys for the intended branch line of railway from Queenstown to the junction at Youghal are in progress by Messrs. Lefann and Bell, C.E.

The town of Nenagh has been lighted with gas—a desirable step.

At the Mendicity Institution, Dublin (a portion of which has been devoted to accommodation for public baths and washhouses, additional baths are being constructed. The baths are on the principal story, in a wing of the institution, and although of a limited number, are provided with every requisite consistent with their respective classes. The washhouses, which contain forty tubs (supplied with hot and cold water pipes, and steam chamber), wringing-machine, mangle, drying-closet heated by two saddle boilers, with draw-out room, &c. &c. are in the basement. We find that the poor, with whom the locality abounds, avail themselves but to a trifling extent of the advantages afforded by this institution. The baths are but poorly attended, which is in some measure accounted for by the building with which they are in contact. We do not find the Dublin corporation maturing the idea long since projected of establishing public baths and washhouses on a proper and extensive scale, although plans for such are in their possession.

The Roman Catholic Church of Adam and Eve, at Dublin, is to have an Ionic portico of, we believe, chiselled granite stone. Mr. P. Byrne, architect, furnished the drawings, and Mr. T. Murphy is declared the contractor.

The principal front of the Ballinrobe Convent and schools will be proceeded with early in spring.

The local journals of Galway speak of municipal and public improvements at every side, some of which we have noticed previously. House-building is brisk there. Lighthouses are being erected at the entrance to the harbour by the Ballast Board; Messrs. Crowe, of Dublin, contractors. There is a good demand for workmen with remunerative wages. This speaks well for the future, and contrasts strongly with the past.

A new building containing library, reading-room, principal staircase, &c. is being erected in connection with the Clonmel Mechanics' Institute. The front will have the principal story rusticated with semicircular-headed windows at intervals. In centre building is a *pseudo portico* (with cornice on Cantilever brackets), and spacious landing to same. Mr. J. J. Lyons, architect.

The Londonderry and Enniskillen line to Omagh is progressing, and we have heard on credible authority that it is likely to be opened about the 1st April, 1853.

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